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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001227

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PINS PTER I2

SUBJECT: POSSIBLE SADR MILITIA TIES TO MUTHANNA PC
COUNCILMAN ASSASSINATION

Classified By: Deputy PRT Team Leader Wade Weems for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Muthanna cable.

¶2. (S) Summary: A Muthanna Provincial Council (PC) member and a

provincial judge provided information about the investigation into the February 20, 2007 assassination of former Muthanna Deputy Provincial Council Chairman Mohammad Hanoon. The PC member reported that both she and Hanoon had been threatened prior to

the assassination for exposing a scandal centering around the misuse of PC funds last year. The judge is leading the investigation into the murder. Both officials agreed that Hanoon's role in exposing the scandal was the likely motive for

the murder, but also said that a Sadrist militia may have been

used to carry out the assassination. This case highlights Sadrists' ties to senior officials within the local government

and suggests that militias are not only targeting political opponents, but also are actively involved in a range of criminal

activities, potentially including contract killing. End summary.

¶3. (SBU) No public announcement has been made about the perpetrators of the attack against Hanoon who was killed after

leaving a mosque following prayers in the city of al-Khidr. Hanoon's assassination followed a February 18 assassination attempt against Lt. Col Ali, the acting chief of Muthanna police

who has led efforts to crack down on the Sadrist militia group

Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM). Another PC member, Dr. Talib Abdulhussein,

continues to recover following a March 28 assassination attempt

in Samawah. The incidents have caused alarm in a province that

has been calm relative to other southern provinces. Last year Muthanna became the first province to achieve Provincial Iraqi

Control (PIC) of security.

¶4. (S) Members of the Muthanna Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) met with PC member Wafaa Fadhil Abdulhassan (please protect), who stated that she and Hanoon had been involved in uncovering a scandal in August 2006 in which officials allegedly

overcharged the PC for expenditures. Implicated were three associates of then PC Chairman Asad Abdul Amir Duayni. The chairman was accused of complicity in the scandal.

¶ 5. (S) Abdulhassan stated that one of Duayni's associates implicated in the scandal is related to the head of the Sadr organization in Samawah and sought protection from the group when he was sought by police. She said both she and Hanoon were subsequently threatened and a man told them that he had been hired to kill them, but refused to carry out the plot. The hired man was killed approximately two weeks prior to Hanoon's murder.

¶ 6. (S) Judge Abbas Monsoor (please protect), an investigative judge overseeing the investigation in al-Khidr, echoed Abdulhassan's sentiments. He told PRT members that witnesses were unwilling to come forward. The motive for the killing likely concerned Hanoon's role in denouncing the corruption scandal. However, the perpetrators may have militia ties.

¶ 7. (S) Comment: Hanoon was considered an honest and upright man in a province where corruption is rampant. He was also said to have even favored dialogue between the PC and Sadrists, raising doubts about any ideological motivation for his assassination. Both officials we spoke with suggested that the motive for Hanoon's assassination was his role in exposing corruption within the PC and a militia may have been used to carry out the killing. His killing highlights Sadrists' ties to senior officials within the local government and suggests

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that militias are not only targeting political opponents, but also are actively involved in a range of criminal activities. A political grudge or common crime, rather than ideology, appears to be the motive for the killing. This episode also appears to bolster an argument made by some in the province that JAM members are often freelancing criminals who have re-flagged themselves under a Sadrist banner for political cover and greater license to flaunt the law. End Comment.
CROCKER